United Nations A/52/PV.27

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

27th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 7 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences (A/52/340/Add.1)

The President: This morning the Assembly will first turn its attention to document A/52/340/Add.1, which contains a letter dated 6 October 1997 addressed to me by the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences. As members are aware, the Assembly, in paragraph 7 of its resolution 40/243, decided that no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly should be permitted to meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

As indicated in the letter I have just mentioned, the Committee on Conferences has recommended that the General Assembly authorize the Committee on Information to meet in New York during the main part of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that the General Assembly adopts the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov.

Mr. Kamilov (Uzbekistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to your high office, and to express our confidence in the success of the work of the current session. I also wish to thank sincerely Ambassador Razali Ismail for his enormous contribution to the work of the sessions of the General Assembly over which he presided.

The changes which have been taking place in our world in recent years and the formation of a qualitatively new geopolitical system of international relations require the adaptation of the United Nations to new realities, with the creation of a flexible and efficient international mechanism which can take effective measures to address the new challenges of our time.

In Uzbekistan we have a positive assessment of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's plan for reforming the United Nations. Although a number of these proposals require careful study and additional elaboration, we can already highlight concrete aspects which deserve support. I refer primarily to the decision on the enlargement of the permanent membership of the Security Council through

97-86169 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

the inclusion of Germany and Japan, countries which today are playing a significant role in world economic and political affairs.

We also support the enlargement of the non-permanent membership of the Security Council, which, in our view, would provide for a more democratic representation of other States in this body.

To promote efficiency in implementing the resolutions of the United Nations, there is a need to reinforce and broaden the authority of the Secretary-General. In our view, we should also support the proposal to establish the post of a Deputy Secretary-General.

The idea of merging all the United Nations entities in different countries under one flag in the so-called United Nations Houses seems to us quite rational.

The reform of the United Nations administration structure will allow for reallocation of the funds saved to enhance development programmes.

The creation of a single agency to combat crime, terrorism, drug-trafficking and money-laundering is also a timely proposal.

The proposals on consolidating the economic and social departments, cutting down on United Nations administrative staff, replacing the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and establishing a streamlined Emergency Relief Coordination Office to coordinate activities of all the United Nations agencies in implementing assistance projects, also merit our attention.

Maintaining security and stability in Central Asia and providing conditions for the sustainable development of the States of the region are among the crucial guidelines for the foreign policy of Uzbekistan. To achieve these goals, Uzbekistan has put forward concrete initiatives, particularly within the rostrum of the United Nations.

I should like to take this opportunity to draw attention again to a number of problems which require an immediate solution, both at the regional level and at the broader international level.

I refer first to the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, which has recently become particularly brutal, and to the continuing instability in Tajikistan.

Our position of principle regarding the Afghan settlement remains unchanged. Its major aspects include such points as the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Afghanistan; the rejection of force as a means of settling the conflict; the cessation of external interference; the imposition of an arms embargo; the participation in a phased peace process of all the major forces involved in the conflict; the implementation of the peace process under the aegis of the United Nations, and with the participation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); and the creation of a broad-based coalition Government including all the various opposition parties.

We share the view of the Secretary-General that if the meaningless civil war in Afghanistan is to be halted, regional and international participants must shoulder additional obligations. Despite all the complications of the situation around Afghanistan, trends have recently been observed which can, and indeed must, be used to begin the peace process.

The proposal on imposing an arms embargo deserves special attention. Such an embargo, which has already been proposed by Uzbekistan on many occasions, must be considered the principal condition for halting external interference in Afghanistan's affairs. We are well aware of the technical difficulties related to the implementation of this initiative in the conditions prevailing in Afghanistan. However, we do not think that they are insurmountable. In our view, the process of imposing an arms embargo should be divided into two stages: first, the adoption by the Security Council of a resolution on the embargo, which would be political in nature; secondly, the drawing up of United Nations control machinery for compliance.

We welcome the stepping up of United Nations efforts to resolve the Afghan problem, in particular, the appointment of Mr. Brahimi as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. We hope that the United Nations will also support our initiative for the creation of a contact group from among the countries neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as the United States, Russia and other interested States, together with, of course, representatives of inter-Afghan forces.

Uzbekistan fully supports the principle of the indivisibility of security — internal, regional and global. Our country was among the first of the newly independent States to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. At the forty-eighth

session of the General Assembly, in 1993, Uzbekistan called upon the international community to declare Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone, and we have been consistently moving towards the implementation of this initiative.

Concrete confirmation of this policy was the holding of the international conference "Central Asia — Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone" in Tashkent on 14 to 16 September, under United Nations auspices and with the participation of high-level representatives of more than 60 international organizations and countries. This forum was a major international event in the history of the region. However, we are well aware that the process of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia is not a one-time political action. It must be carried out within the framework of existing agreements and in accordance with international experience, in particular within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

In this regard, on the regional level a reliable system of collective efforts by States participating in this initiative should be developed. Those efforts must ensure the non-proliferation regime, the ecological safety of hazardous industries that involve nuclear raw materials and the prevention of leakage of nuclear technologies and materials.

On the international level it is necessary to give priority attention to the settlement of regional problems. The phased advancement towards global security is possible only after we create secure and stable regions. In other words, when dealing with global problems, it is essential to follow the principle of moving from regionalism to globalism.

It is also necessary to fundamentally reconsider the security guarantees provided to the non-nuclear States, first and foremost to those participating in nuclear-weapon-free zones. We need to organically combine the efforts for promoting non-proliferation and ensuring global nuclear security with the resolution of regional problems. The problem of non-proliferation must be considered in close linkage with significant reductions of other types of weapons of mass destruction.

Uzbekistan highly appreciates the efforts of international organizations — first of all the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — for their support of the Central Asian initiative. We would like to request the General Assembly, its President and the Secretary-General to assist in the passage of a special resolution in support of the initiative declaring Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone and in the establishment of a United Nations expert group to study the forms and elements of the regional agreement on this issue.

Our cooperation within the framework of the OSCE is making a significant contribution to enhancing regional security in Central Asia. We consider the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Expanded Bureau Meeting Seminar, held in September 1997 in the capital of Uzbekistan, as the world community's recognition of Central Asia's importance in issues related to strengthening peace and stability on the regional and global levels.

The creation of the Central Asian collective peacekeeping battalion by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was an important step towards safeguarding peace and stability in the region. For the first time on the territory of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan broad-scale exercises of the Central Asian collective peacekeeping battalion, Centrazbat 97, were held, with the participation of multinational forces. These exercises constituted a serious test, the successful completion of which confirmed this battalion as a fully fledged unit in the United Nations reserve peacekeeping forces.

Once again we should like to take advantage of this United Nations forum to call upon the international community to pool its efforts to tackle the serious threat to the security of the Central Asian region that may also have consequences on the global level. I am referring to the ecological situation in the Aral Sea basin.

The current session of the General Assembly — the Reform Assembly, as it was called by Secretary-General Kofi Annan — must give a fresh impetus to the joint efforts of the international community in combating organized crime, drug dealing and terrorism. We need to develop transnational programmes to confront these challenges and threats.

We may confidently say that if favourable conditions and trends are maintained, in the twenty-first century Central Asia, given its geostrategic significance and its vast natural, energy and human resources, will become a promising and dynamic regional market of a global importance.

The interdependence of the situation emerging in Central Asia, the common European security system taking shape and the outlook for developing situations within the vast Asian continent means there is an urgent need for the international community to take measures to ensure durable peace and stability in this region along with its sustainable development.

Mr. Koba (Central African Republic) (*interpretation from French*): First and foremost, Sir, I would like to echo the eminent speakers who have already addressed you from this rostrum in conveying the warm congratulations of the Central African delegation on your resounding election to the presidency of this, the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. The fact that you, Sir, have been chosen bears witness to the fact that your country, Ukraine, continues to play an important role on the world stage. Your wealth of experience and your abilities as an experienced diplomat augur well indeed for the success of our work, and I can also assure you that you can count on our support and our availability to assist you.

I would also like to express our fullest satisfaction with the work of your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, for the talent and skill with which he so wonderfully discharged his duties. And we assure His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, whose election was only a just reward for his many years of service to the United Nations, of the renewed support of the people and Government of the Central African Republic.

This session is being held at a delicate time in the history of our Organization, because it is faced with many different political, economic, social, cultural, legal and institutional problems which call for the appropriate reforms.

To renew the United Nations, to turn it into a dynamic, democratic and effective organization, is a major challenge for this session, which the Secretary-General quite rightly described as the Reform Assembly. His brilliant report presented on 16 July 1997 is perfectly in tune with the Member States' expectations, because it not only highlights the challenges facing us on the threshold of the first century of a new millennium, but it also, and above all, puts forward proposals for the longer term.

The United Nations has a very important role to play in the areas of safeguarding and maintaining international peace and security and promoting social and economic development, democracy, human rights and justice. The Organization must be reformed and strengthening so as to better confront the new realities of today's world. The Central African Republic will make its own modest contribution to this very important endeavour in close collaboration with the member States of the Organization of African Unity and the Non-Aligned Movement.

As regards reforming the Security Council, the Central African Republic hopes that the Council will be expanded so as to provide equitable geographical representation.

But what about the ever-widening gap between three quarters of humankind and the remainder? What about the proliferation of armed conflicts against a backdrop of intolerance, ethnic tension and deadly political confrontations that jeopardize international peace and security? Our Organization does not seem to be able to come to grips with these problems.

And yet, a few years ago, after a series of major events radically transformed the old post-war order, we believed that the world was at last poised to move into a new era because of the ensuing clear-cut improvement in the international political climate and the new possibilities for cooperation that emerged. These were supposed to build confidence among nations and facilitate the quest for compromise on most of the questions of concern to the international community.

Regrettably, we were overly optimistic. In reflecting on the sad realities of the day, I have in mind particularly the many human lives lost in vain in Algeria and the thousands of women and children forcibly torn from their homes and who, in the neighbouring Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Somalia and elsewhere, are still paying a heavy price for our imperfections, our contradictions and our intolerance.

I believe that it is time to call upon the international community and our Organization — which in this alarmingly serious case seems not to be fulfilling its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security — to tackle resolutely the internal conflicts that are unfolding within our own States. We must address these new conflicts, which entail serious violations of fundamental human rights and which we are ill-prepared to prevent and manage, because what is at stake is the very existence of our States, along with the balance and cohesiveness of the international community.

The Central African Republic had cause to welcome the convening on 25 September last of the ministerial-level meeting of the member States of the Security Council devoted to the situation in Africa. The recommendations emanating from those deliberations should be translated into reality.

The delegation of the Central African Republic nonetheless welcomes the fact that significant progress towards peace has been achieved in Angola, Liberia and Haiti. But we continue to believe that a great deal of work remains to be done by the parties concerned to overcome the obstacles standing in the way of reconciliation and the restoration of peace in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and in Cyprus.

Unlike in other regions of the world, where renewed economic growth is henceforth irreversible, Africa's lack of good performance and its economic and social situation remain a cause for concern in this era of globalization. However, we are not underestimating the scope and the complexity of the crucial problems facing the international community at century's end. To resolve these problems, a new type of cooperation is urgently needed so as not to exclude three quarters of humankind from the march towards progress and the common weal.

Africa continues to experience immense economic difficulties because of its lack of control over certain external factors affecting its development, such as the collapse in the prices fetched by its commodities, its debt burden and the inadequacy of its capital flows, which have prevented it from achieving sustained economic growth and raising the living standards of its peoples.

Worse yet is the case of the least developed countries, most of which are located on the African continent and whose situation remains abysmal notwithstanding the timid steps forward taken here and there. Though globalization has given rise to a new social contract, the principle of partnership and of shared responsibility between the least developed countries and the international community, with the goal of reversing socio-economic decline and speeding up the process of sustained growth and sustainable development, should guide both sides in their commitment. Now the question is how to become competitive without the support of official development assistance, which is continuing to decline.

As we see it, this alarming situation calls for a pragmatic approach to cooperation between Africa and its partners, in particular the international financial and monetary institutions, which should not lose sight of these factors in determining modalities for cooperating with the continent and providing it access to global resources. We cannot overemphasize the urgent need for a greater sense of responsibility and for a far stronger commitment on the part of the entire international community vis-à-vis this continent, which is foundering economically and socially. It is this new awareness that will help Africa emerge at last from the chaos and anarchy that continue to engulf it.

Without economic and social progress, there can be no talk of peace nor of democracy, because peace, democracy and development go hand in hand. This is especially true in the case of the Central African Republic, long known, owing to its long-standing commitment to peace, as the Switzerland of Africa. Its President, Ange-Félix Patassé, rose to the highest office in the land through free and transparent elections and daily preached peace and dialogue in the Central African subregion. Nonetheless, the world was recently witness to the sad spectacle of the Central African Republic's being assailed by what have come to be known as the serial mutinies of Bangui, simply because of its inability to consolidate its still fledgling democratic experience through sustained economic and social development.

The case of the Central African Republic casts light on the root causes of the wave of violence that is sweeping our subregion. The mutinies — which, tragically, lasted a full year and have thrown the entire country into near-civil war — occurred against the backdrop of a tribally motivated attempt at regaining power and as the result of manipulation by outside forces seeking to put an end to our democratic process. But none of this would have been possible had it not been for the very difficult economic and social situation of our country. The joint impact of a terrible legacy, the free-fall devaluation of the CFA franc and the chronically meagre revenues coming into the public treasury had for all practical purposes created a situation in which the State could no longer regularly pay its civil servants.

The upshot of this crisis was all but catastrophic because the damage done by the tragic events of April, May and November 1996 gravely undermined our country's potential for economic and social development. The technical committee set up to take stock of the damage concluded that for the first two cases of mutiny alone, it would cost some 41.9 billion CFA francs to make up for the losses experienced by the State, businesses, projects and individuals — not to mention the

cost of the measures needed to help the many victims of that conflict.

Beyond the necessary mobilization of all our compatriots — to whom His Excellency Mr. Ange-Félix Patassé, President of the Republic, has issued a powerful call for the restoration of peace and national unity as a foundation for the genuine economic recovery of our country — it is only appropriate for our partners and the entire international community to stand with us and not against us. For it is the intention of the Central African Republic to continue and consolidate the democratic process to which it is resolutely committed.

And beyond the praiseworthy support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), my landlocked country must be given the wherewithal to continue to be — as we already are out of a sense of moral duty — a land of welcome and hospitality for Sudanese, Rwandan, Burundian, Congolese and other brothers and sisters who are paying a heavy price for our world's intolerance, ethnic tensions and deadly political wrangling.

The fact is that it is in adversity that one knows one's true friends. Our own adversity has enabled the people of the Central African Republic to gauge the sympathy and solidarity they have enjoyed during the most trying times of their history. On behalf of His Excellency Mr. Ange-Félix Patassé, President of the Republic and Head of State and of Government, and of the people of the Central African Republic, I reiterate our thanks to the entire international community, and most particularly to France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States of America, Japan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Gabon, Chad, Senegal, Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the European Union, for the support and invaluable assistance they are graciously according us.

I take this opportunity also to convey particular thanks to all the States members of the Security Council, which on 6 August last unanimously adopted resolution 1125 (1997) on the Central African Republic. The immediate effect of that decision was to deter open attempts at destabilization, and to enable — as it continues to do — the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB) better to ensure peace and security in the capital and the provinces of the Central African Republic.

The peace is still fragile and precarious, and on behalf of the entire people of the Central African Republic we urgently appeal to the United Nations to enable the mandate of MISAB to be extended until the Central African Republic possesses a loyal national army that can guarantee the survival of our republican institutions.

I wish the Assembly full success in its work on the basis of the principle of universality which is so dear to our Organization.

The President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Jérémie Bonnelame, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Seychelles.

Mr. Bonnelame (Seychelles) (*interpretation from French*): I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

I wish also to thank your predecessor, Ambassador Razali of Malaysia, for the skill and commitment with which he guided our work during the last session.

I convey to the Secretary-General and his staff my high appreciation of the often difficult initiatives they have taken this year to promote peace not only between peoples but also within nations. These initiatives accent the Organization's role and its principles, to which I am pleased to reaffirm the commitment of the people of Seychelles. There have also been initiatives to promote development and to protect the environment and the weak among us, and to help stateless individuals and refugees from countries that are often marginalized.

We need a consistent, effective United Nations backed by the funds necessary for it to carry out its mandate. The Secretary-General has proposed a series of reforms along these lines, and the Republic of Seychelles firmly backs that initiative.

Seychelles is a small island State. Yet we have done all in our power to integrate ourselves fully into international life and into the world economy. In that connection, Seychelles has requested membership of the World Trade Organization; it is already a member of the Indian Ocean Commission and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and recently joined the Southern African Development Community. Seychelles has thus adopted an open economic policy designed to be attractive; yet we continue to face the handicaps

characteristic of an island State, exacerbated by a lack of human and natural resources and by the limits of our domestic markets.

Following the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994, and in accordance with resolutions adopted in international forums, the international community is heeding the appeal of small island States for help in laying and strengthening the foundations of sustainable development. Like larger countries, small island States have the same aspirations, the same needs — and even more so. Yet they are disadvantaged by their greatly limited means and their structurally fragile economies. That is why it would be more equitable to identify specific criteria that would integrate them harmoniously into the process of global cooperation and economic development on both the bilateral and the multilateral levels.

Recently, Seychelles has experienced remarkable climatic setbacks. Unceasing torrential rains of unusual intensity have caused loss of life, flooding, landslides and the destruction of homes and of infrastructure of all kinds. They also threaten the environment on which our lifestyle depends and our ecosystem, especially in coastal areas.

For a small State striving to keep pace with development, an unexpected upheaval, with all its economic and other consequences, can have far-reaching effects that are not immediately evident.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for having quickly dispatched an evaluation mission to take stock not only of the damage done but of the future threats such an upheaval poses, given the climatic change under way on a global level. Moreover, that mission was followed by the launching of an appeal to the international community for assistance. The people of the Seychelles are very grateful for all these actions.

In conclusion, I should like to express the hope that the future of our planet will bring vast improvements, notwithstanding the numerous difficulties that loom on the horizon. The United Nations, through its initiatives and the joint efforts of all peoples, will most surely achieve that goal.

The President: I now call on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Don Miguel Oyono Ndong Mifumu.

Mr. Oyono Ndong Mifumu (Equatorial Guinea) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mr. President, it is a pleasure for me to join preceding speakers in congratulating you on the high distinction bestowed upon you and your country through your election to preside over this regular session of the General Assembly, to which we have all come imbued with our shared aspirations for the future of mankind. Once again, we come to this forum to convey the warmest greetings of solidarity, peace and hope of the people and Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and, in particular, to express my country's views on the issues to be debated at this session.

We are three years away from a new millennium. This waiting period is an opportunity to think deeply about the challenges it has in store for us. We have moved in a very short time from a bipolar world, marked by the cold war and both strategic and ideological confrontations, to the new dynamics of globalization and the interdependence of States in their relations within the international system.

Indeed, when we consider that the millennium is about to end and that our Organization has now been in existence for more than 50 years, we must admit that a great deal has been achieved in terms of progress for mankind, particularly in the spheres of economic, scientific and technological development. Unfortunately, however, there are still grey areas of uncertainty as regards the future of mankind and the possibilities of establishing peace and security throughout the world.

In third world countries such as ours, for example, the lives of millions of people have been affected by a halt to progress and development as a result of extreme poverty, wars and armed conflicts and of the resurgence of mercenary activities and organized crime. In brief, the people are subjected to wanton violence, and as a result social, political and economic systems are breaking down.

We believe that the burden placed on our peoples is too great and that their problems require a lasting and stable response from the United Nations, to include the elimination of neo-interventionist practices; the prevention of conflicts; the reduction of poverty; the elimination of neo-protectionist barriers in world trade; and help in the fight against terrorism, fundamentalism and anachronistic nationalism. The preservation of the environment and the fight against drug-trafficking and the consumption of illicit drugs must also be prime objectives

of our collective action. These problems are not restricted to the territory of a single State, and therefore their solution demands the involvement and solidarity of all nations the world over, in a context of consensus and more coordinated international cooperation.

This, in turn, creates the need to ensure democratic reform of institutions and organizations of a global scope. The division of the world into categories must become a thing of the past, although we agree that some among us must shoulder special responsibilities vis-à-vis mankind since they, in a sense, are the ones responsible for certain threats that face us: the nuclear threat, the large-scale production and sale of armaments, the deterioration of the environment and the exercise of absolute power over the economy, finance and advances in science, technology and information. For if a third world exists today, it is only because someone exploited it to create a first world. We do not intend to wait for the emergence of a fourth world whose means and resources we can exploit to become developed. The point is to make sure that the resources amassed by the first world, the countries of the North, are today made available to the developing countries. For that to happen, the international trading system must be fair, poverty must be reduced, the social development and scientific and technological advance of developing countries must be fostered and the debt problem must be alleviated. In short, the differences in the quality of life that separate the citizens of the North from those of the South must be drastically reduced, in a spirit of open solidarity that will work for the progress and development of all countries.

All these aspects are the real issues to be discussed as we strive to attain lasting world peace and sustainable development in the coming millennium. The United Nations must therefore become a much more global and democratic world Organization so that it can take a dynamic approach to the problems weighing on mankind. It must be modernized, brought up to date and in tune with the new times, able to express the common will of all nations. Therefore, it must be restructured.

In this connection, Equatorial Guinea feels, as do many others, that it is time to reform the decision-making body of the United Nations, the Security Council. With regard to reform, we do not know whether it is the number of the Council's members that has prevented the United Nations from functioning with greater flexibility and efficiency. Nor are we sure that an increase in the number of permanent members will make for a more representative United Nations. What we must attempt to gain is more voices expressing the will of the peoples to see a more prosperous, peaceful and lastingly stable world. If this cannot be achieved by returning to the General Assembly its legitimate rights, it would be reasonable to have more members of the Security Council representing the regions and to ensure that the rules governing the use of the veto take into account the interest of the majority.

Equatorial Guinea is interested in ensuring that we have a properly functioning mechanism for agreement that reflects, above all, the spirit of equity and justice within the United Nations. For Equatorial Guinea, which is a small country in terms of both area and population, the democratic functioning of the United Nations provides a guarantee of security and stability in international relations and, above all, ensures scrupulous respect for every nation's right of sovereignty.

It is no idle claim that countries like ours do not receive appropriate treatment in relations between States. This applies, for example, to the vague demands relating to the universal principle of respect for fundamental human rights, which include political, economic and social rights.

In the specific case of Equatorial Guinea, it is neither understandable nor acceptable that, despite our great efforts to achieve a participatory democracy and respect for human rights, international public opinion is still being manipulated by some in order to project a false image of our country to the outside world for reasons that are inconsistent with this universal principle. We do not believe that anyone has a monopoly on values and virtues in this respect.

However, some years ago my country reached the conclusion that respect for human rights comes from a continuous process and not from an immediate response to criteria and demands imposed by groups or individuals with partisan political interests. It is in this context that the Government of Equatorial Guinea, of its own free will, is participating in and cooperating with all the initiatives of the United Nations and certain friendly countries to consolidate respect for human rights in the country. To that end, working with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, we have already organized various training, educational and information programmes relating to human rights.

My country is also proud to be one of the few countries in the world that, of its own free will, has agreed with another country — in our case, the United

States of America — a technical and financial assistance programme for measures aimed at the better exercise within our society of all human rights. In the context of this programme, far-reaching legal reforms have been set out to regulate this exercise of rights, as well as to achieve better administration and governance by the State. All these measures will be free from political interference based on ideological or partisan interests.

From this rostrum, therefore, I should like to confirm to international public opinion that in Equatorial Guinea human rights form an integral part of the priorities of the Government and of all the political forces of the nation and that we are critiquing and continuously assessing our progress. We do not, therefore, need either the approval or the guidance of any other society or institution in order to evaluate this tangible reality. Nor do we need any favourable or unfavourable propaganda from international media that may be linked to interests and pressure groups with hidden agendas.

We certainly agree that the same degree of pressure that is brought to bear with regard to the political rights of peoples must also be brought to bear in order to bring about more concrete support for the right of peoples to development and the progress of nations. It is our unanimous desire that in the third millennium the millions of men, women and children of the world will have the right to health services, education, decent housing, drinking water, electricity, food and clothing. But this objective cannot be achieved through restrictive measures and policies or through discriminatory economic blockades. We also wish to note that even these policies are not applied equitably throughout the international community.

Nevertheless, thanks to our strong conviction that we must play the principal role in our own development, today more than ever Equatorial Guinea is being targeted by certain forces and is becoming a strategically and economically significant zone in the subregion of central Africa. At the economic level, our country has just attained the status of oil-producing country, and attempts are being made to destabilize it for purposes of hegemony and for strategic reasons. Exactly five months ago, thanks to the spirit of African solidarity demonstrated by our sister republic of Angola, my country was saved from an attempted invasion by mercenaries, which was organized and financed by certain foreign political groups with murky and undisclosed designs on our nation.

Instability in the subregion of central Africa is today threatening the security of the region and the continent. Plans, strategies and machinery for destabilization are being fashioned from outside the region that are capable of destroying the present incipient democratic regimes in the region. Powerful communications media are actively involved in systematically distorting, disinformation and the misrepresentation of everything that is happening in the region. The situation in Angola, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, as well as the recent conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have been presented to international public opinion as Dantesque and apocalyptic.

We ask the United Nations to follow up on everything that is taking place in this region, particularly in the area of the Gulf of Guinea, from the Niger river delta to the enclave of Cabinda, as well as in the Great Lakes region.

In the specific case of the Republic of the Congo, a sister country with which we share common interests, the Government of Equatorial Guinea fully supports the international mediation efforts of the President of the Republic of Gabon, Mr. El Hadj Omar Bongo and of the special representative of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

We have the feeling that a new cold war is being waged in Africa based on cultural and linguistic influences. The fact that English, French, Portuguese and Spanish languages are spoken should only serve to enrich our values and capacities in terms of international cooperation and should be not a factor for confrontation and antagonism based on hegemony. This phenomenon has a serious adverse effect on our ability to achieve unity at the continental level in Africa for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. We therefore appeal to the United Nations and the OAU to initiate consensus-based actions that will lead to the reduction of such differences.

In this context, my Government is making efforts to maintain an internal and regional balance by developing a policy based on dialogue, consensus and good-neighbourliness, which are indispensable tools for ensuring peace and security in the continent.

In this process of political and economic change there have been setbacks and difficulties, but we have kept determinedly to the upward path that will enable us to leave behind a past that produced severe economic regressiveness and a breakdown of democratic principles and values. We want Equatorial Guinea to be included fully within the dynamics of change and globalization.

We want to ensure that we are incorporated into the regenerative trend of free market economy with a strong social component and dialogue based on patriotism, flexibility and tolerance among all the political forces and throughout civil society in our country.

Indeed, we have just held, from 8 to 13 September 1997, a national economic conference designed essentially to bring about a national dialogue to achieve a definition of a consensus-based strategy involving all political forces, civil society, non-governmental organizations and religious associations, with the participation of international agencies of the United Nations system, the World Bank, the European Union and African regional and subregional organizations, as well as friendly nations, aimed at implementing structural reforms in the economy and sustainable development of the country, through the rational and transparent use of oil, forest and fishing resources.

In the political field, we will proceed with the free and transparent reform of laws regulating the exercise of democratic liberties to achieve better governance for our nation. We have the firm political determination to attain these objectives and to meet our commitments, and we appeal for international solidarity.

I cannot conclude without expressing, on behalf of the Government of Equatorial Guinea, our warmest congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his wise and sound suggestions for reforming the bodies of the United Nations.

Equatorial Guinea will continue to support those efforts, aimed at achieving more dynamic and flexible mechanisms and structures for peacekeeping and the promotion of balanced and sustainable social and economic development in the world.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, His Excellency Mr. Muratbek Imanaliev.

Mr. Imanaliev (Kyrgyzstan) *(interpretation from Russian):* Allow me, on behalf of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and its people, to congratulate my colleague the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr. Udovenko, on his election to the high office of President of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, and to wish him success in his endeavours. May I also express our feelings of respect for his country, which is playing an important role in resolving regional and global issues.

I would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the previous President of the General Assembly, the representative of the friendly Malaysian people, Ambassador Razali Ismail, for his active and dynamic efforts in establishing constructive dialogue on ways to reform the United Nations.

Like the entire international community, Kyrgyzstan expects genuine progress regarding the complex issue of the reform of the United Nations to come out of the present session. We are confident that the session will be able to cope with the problems facing the Organization today during this difficult and complicated period. The President and the Government of my country fully support the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to enhance the efficiency of the United Nations, and his ability to respond sensitively and adequately to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. We are confident that a renewed United Nations will truly embody the principles and purposes proclaimed in its Charter, ensuring the harmony of the interests of all its Members in the name of peace and progress. We are ready to support all proposals that promote that goal.

Regarding the reform of the Security Council, the issue of improving its methods of work is no less important than the question of enlarging its membership. Kyrgyzstan believes that these questions must be considered together. We continue to support the proposal for permanent membership in the Council for Japan and Germany. However, in our view, the permanent members of the Security Council should also include one representative each from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Mankind is now on the eve of a new millennium, and the changes taking place are altering the image of mankind and shifting the emphasis in the models for understanding and explaining our world. The collapse of a bipolar world has provided us an opportunity to focus efforts on resolving the issues of poverty, health care, education, economic development and democracy. We are all, however, still facing the threat of local and regional conflicts, international terrorism, organized crime, illegal trafficking in drugs and weapons, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the deterioration of the state of the environment. All these negative aspects of human activity threaten the global trend towards strengthening peace and progress, undermine the fragile new democracies, wear down the

strength of the developing countries and generally threaten all our efforts focused on building a safer and better world.

The period after the achievement of independence was decisive for Kyrgyzstan, in the context of the formation of national statehood and of new social and economic ties. The country is actively seeking ways and means to harmoniously integrate itself into the international community. Clear successes have already been achieved on this thorny path in strengthening democratic institutions, radical reform of the economy of the country, improving the means for achieving inter-ethnic agreement, enhancing tolerance and ensuring human rights.

The leadership of the country is also concentrating on those domestic and international issues which must be developed on a permanent and positive basis for the well-being of the population of Kyrgyzstan.

Our country was the first of the newly independent States to draw up and adopt a national plan of action for environmental protection. In the light of the implementation of the decisions of the Rio Conference, Kyrgyzstan is now carrying out a country project, Capacity 21, which consists of three major components: coordination of and carrying out ecological studies, stable management of water resources and economic growth and social development. Through an edict of President Akayev, a national strategy has been adopted for sustainable human development which recognizes man, and his harmonious existence with nature, as the highest priority. Kyrgyzstan was the first country in the region to draw up a "concept for ecological security".

The Declaration adopted by the conference in Rio ranks mountainous ecological systems among those particularly vulnerable to natural and man-made impacts. It is universally recognized that peoples living in mountainous regions bear far heavier social and economic burdens than those who live in plains.

In the light of these factors and circumstances and also on the basis of the decisions of the Global Environment Facility, our country held an international conference on problems of mountain ecosystems. The participants in the conference put forward a proposal to proclaim an international year of the mountains, a proposal which was actively supported by President Akayev in his message to the delegates to the mountain forum and in his letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

At the regular session of the Economic and Social Council in July this year, in Geneva, a resolution proclaiming International Year of Mountains, sponsored by 44 countries, was adopted by consensus. The resolution contains a request to the Secretary-General to present to the regular session of the Economic and Social Council in 1998, after consultations with Governments and with the relevant international, regional and non-governmental organizations, a report on the desirability of proclaiming the International Year of Mountains and other measures to ensure the sustainable development of mountainous countries.

I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to Governments and, above all, to the other sponsors to submit the relevant information for incorporation into a complete and comprehensive report on this question by the Secretary-General. I hope the General Assembly will in turn adopt a consensus decision on this initiative.

At the same time, we believe that it is possible, with support from Governments, to raise the question of drawing up a global programme of action to ensure the sustainable development of countries with mountainous regions, similar to the programme being carried out for small island developing countries.

There can be no doubt that the economic gap between the rich developed countries and the developing world has widened over recent years. The poorest countries are not in a position to take off economically or socially and are continuing to lose the ties that enable them to participate in the world economy. We can assume that if this trend continues, their numbers will continue to grow, and this represents a serious threat to all human development. We need to halt that trend. In this context, in the view of the experts, the most promising approaches are to increase investments in human resources to encourage the implementation of ecologically clean and effective technologies and to reform price structures.

In our view, it is precisely in these areas that United Nations activities, in new conditions, should be stepped up in order to promote economic and social progress. We support the efforts of the Secretary-General to promote stable and sustainable development.

Supporting peace and security is the highest priority task of the United Nations. We place great store by the United Nations peacekeeping activities and pay due tribute to the courage and selflessness of United Nations personnel working in regions of conflict. The efforts of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan,

headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Gerd Merrem, and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), culminated successfully in Moscow on 27 June 1997 with the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, which opened the way for the country's transition from war to reconstruction and rehabilitation.

As a representative of one of the States that is a guarantor of peace in Tajikistan, I am gratified to note my country's involvement in this event. The mediation efforts of Kyrgyzstan, and of President Akayev himself, helped bring about the important agreement in May this year that laid the way for the General Agreement, namely, the signing of the Protocol on Political Questions. However, as the events in August demonstrated, peace in Tajikistan is still extremely fragile and its survival depends, first and foremost, on the Tajik parties themselves and how faithful they are to the commitments they have made. We are convinced that our Tajik friends will be able to see this through.

The prospects for peace-building in Tajikistan depend to a significant extent on the situation along the Tajik-Afghan border. The armed conflict in Afghanistan is of the greatest concern to the States of the Central Asian region; it fosters the illegal production and trafficking of drugs and is prompting the massive flow of refugees to neighbouring countries. The President and Government of Kyrgyzstan are firmly convinced that there can be only one solution to the Afghan conflict, namely, a political solution. The problem can be solved with the political will of the Afghan parties above all and assistance from neighbouring States that have an influence in the region.

We have not abandoned hope regarding the organization of direct inter-Afghan negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations to discuss conditions for a ceasefire and subsequent measures to bring about national reconciliation. In November 1996, President Akayev put forward an initiative to hold these negotiations in Bishkek. Subsequently, this proposal was repeated at meetings in New York of top officials and experts on Afghanistan. Building on this initiative, in August the President of Kyrgyzstan appealed to the parties to the conflict and Heads of State and Government concerned.

Kyrgyzstan, which does not share a border with Afghanistan and has no interest aside from ensuring regional security, considers the organization of inter-Afghan negotiations under United Nations auspices an integral part of its peaceful policy of good-neighbourly relations and cooperation. Kyrgyzstan is ready to play the impartial role of mediator and make its good offices available to ensure a peaceful settlement of this problem.

Pursuant to its peaceful policy, Kyrgyzstan has been actively promoting in the United Nations since 1995 the idea of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, as reflected in a number of working papers of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Preparatory Committee of the Conference of Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to be held in the year 2000 and the Disarmament Commission. We are firmly convinced that the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones, which is an important confidence-building measure and a positive backdrop to the disarmament process, is helping strengthen peace and security in the region and, in the final analysis, throughout the world.

With the entry into force of the Treaties of Pelindaba and Bangkok, more than 1.7 billion people will be living in zones free of nuclear weapons. Together with Antarctica, this territory will cover practically the entire southern hemisphere. It is essential that we do all we can to support and promote the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Here, above all, we are hoping for the understanding and support of nuclear-weapon States. At the international conference this September on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, held in Tashkent, Kyrgyzstan proposed the convening of an advisory meeting of the five Central Asian States, the five nuclear-weapon States that are permanent members of the Security Council, and representatives of the United Nations to discuss practical measures to make this idea a reality. The conference approved the proposal.

Kyrgyzstan is actively participating in peacekeeping activities. The Collective Peacekeeping Forces of CIS in Tajikistan includes one of our battalions. Kyrgyz military personnel in the Central Asian peacekeeping battalion took part in the joint exercises held within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) programme Partnership for Peace. Kyrgyzstan is also a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. We are also interested in training an international peace force, military observers and civilian personnel so that they can participate in peacekeeping operations. I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to ask the United Nations and the

donor countries to give us as much assistance as possible in this area.

In conclusion, I should like to say that this is a decisive session for the United Nations. I should like to express the hope that the interests of individual countries and regions can be reconciled and that they will not prevail over responsibility for the fate of our common Organization. On this positive note, I should like to end my statement.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bahamas, Her Excellency The Honourable Janet G. Bostwick.

Mrs. Bostwick (Bahamas): I join previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. My delegation is satisfied that your vast experience in international affairs and your proven diplomatic skills will guide the work of this session to a successful conclusion. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation in the execution of the duties of your office.

I also wish to express my delegation's gratitude and congratulations to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, who presided over our Assembly during the fifty-first session with great vigour, skill and resolve. Having had the honour of serving as a Vice-President of that session, I am particularly appreciative of his noteworthy contributions.

This is my first opportunity in this Assembly to address and congratulate our new Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. He is, of course, no stranger to any of us, having faithfully served this Organization for so many years. We are confident that he has the vision, ability and determination to lead the United Nations as it prepares to meet the challenges of the new millennium. I wish to assure the Secretary-General of the continued support and cooperation of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

On behalf of the Government and people of the Bahamas, I also wish to pay tribute to our former Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The Bahamas particularly wishes to recall and salute his tireless efforts in seeking to restore financial stability to our Organization.

Today, I reiterate the Bahamas' solemn pledge that as we lead our nation into a new millennium the primary focus of our efforts will be directed towards improving the delivery of health care, education and skills training, a reduction in the level of serious crime and unemployment, and the eradication of poverty and poor housing. We are committed to achieving the full empowerment of women and equality among the sexes as we work toward the evolution of a society in which our children will live with hope, a society where there is opportunity for all, where there is respect for human rights, fundamental values and the rule of law.

Mr. Altangerel (Mongolia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Our efforts on behalf of the Bahamian people also represent our contribution towards the collective efforts which Member States of the United Nations must make to ensure a safe, stable and productive global society so that progress, peace and development can be achieved for all the people represented here. We are therefore committed to assisting in the much needed reform of this world body, so as to enable us to achieve these goals.

One of the greatest threats to quality of life and to productive development worldwide is criminal behaviour. My Government has set as one of its highest priorities the comprehensive reduction and prevention of crime, in all its forms, including drug-trafficking, money-laundering and illegal trafficking in firearms, and, indeed, in human beings. Those who engage in such menacing activities respect no borders. We therefore implore all Member States, irrespective of size or might, to recognize that the most effective means of reducing crime at the national and international levels is through joint and collaborative efforts.

The Government of the Bahamas supports the strengthening of the international legal order against crime. We also hope that the special session on the question of drugs in 1998 will provide new impetus and resolve to combat this particular menace to all of our societies.

My Government reiterates its call to urgently address the growing problem of the traffic in small arms. The Bahamas, neither a manufacturer nor a vendor of arms, urges those countries involved in the production and sale of arms to impose stringent control measures and provide assistance to vulnerable States to reduce the threat of the traffic in arms.

Another concern of the world's nations is the protection of the environment. The Bahamas recognizes and appreciates that conservation and enhancement of the environment are critically important to the well-being of our people, and especially that of future generations. Consequently, our national planning process incorporates community environmental education and the regular monitoring and enforcement of laws for the protection of natural resources and the conservation of habitats. Indeed, during the course of this year, the Government of the Bahamas enacted legislation to protect our physical landscape and prevent the destruction of certain indigenous trees. The expansion of green and open spaces for the benefit of the general population is another key pillar in our environmental policy.

Tourism is the leading industry in the Bahamas and the fastest growing industry in the world. We are all aware, however, that the development of tourism does not always take place in harmony with environmental protection and conservation. Mindful of this fact, the Bahamas, along with its regional partners, seeks to develop strategies, policies and procedures which will ensure that the continued development of the industry is consistent with standards of environmental sustainability. In this vein, the Caribbean Community has adopted a regional position against the transportation of hazardous and radioactive substances through the Caribbean Sea, a concern previously voiced in this forum.

While the concept of sustainable development remains subject to further definition, my Government believes that poverty reduction and social development can and must be achieved in concert with environmental integrity, economic stability and good health. The proper integration of developing economies into the rapidly advancing globalization of world trade will, we believe, mark the measure of our success in these areas. Regrettably, developments over the past decade have not always met expectations.

In spite of the technological revolution of the last decade and the rapid increase in worldwide commerce, the benefits of the globalization of the world's economy have not been evenly distributed. Developing countries continue to be marginalized even as the world's market economy grows at an extraordinary pace.

Globalization can offer great opportunities, but only if it is managed carefully and with more concern for equity, morality and indeed compassion. An enabling environment must be created for all to take full advantage of the new opportunities created by globalization.

The peculiar vulnerability of small islands — their susceptibility to natural disasters, their economy's dependence on primary products, their small human and material resource base — means that small island States have much more at stake in achieving sustainable development. The Bahamas, therefore, attaches great importance to the 1999 review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and calls for the mobilization of external resources for its further implementation. We are also pleased to note that consideration is being given by the United Nations to the possible development of a vulnerability index. We welcome the proposed convening of an expert group meeting later this year to review various proposals, and look forward to the completion of the technical study now in progress.

The development of a mechanism such as the vulnerability index will help to alleviate a concern which the Bahamas has repeatedly expressed in this assembly regarding the persistent use of per capita gross national product as the major measurement of wealth. It is our view that this criterion is an inadequate measurement of development and is often inconsistent with the principles of equity.

The vulnerability of small island States is painfully demonstrated in the unfolding natural disaster on the Caribbean island of Montserrat, where volcanic activity has forever changed the physical, sociological and psychological landscape. Indeed, the viability of the island to provide a base for the livelihood and development of the people of Montserrat is yet to be determined. We, the Government and people of the Bahamas, wish to express our solidarity with, and pledge our continued support to, the people of Montserrat during this particularly difficult time.

We are similarly conscious of the fact that natural disasters affect virtually all the Member States of this Organization, large and small, developed and developing. In recent times, typhoons in South-East Asia, floods in Eastern and Central Europe and in the central states and provinces of the United States and Canada, and earthquakes in South America, and most recently in Italy and Indonesia, have wreaked untold suffering on millions of people.

As we look towards the twenty-first century, we must assess how best this Organization can prepare itself during the next three years to enter into this new era in human history.

Since becoming a Member of the United Nations in 1973, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas has at successive sessions of the Assembly reaffirmed the importance of the United Nations and has conveyed its commitment to work with other Member States in pursuit of the principles and objectives of the Charter.

In this connection, we congratulate the Secretary-General on the important reform proposals which he has presented, and we stand ready to participate in their comprehensive and constructive review during this session.

It is the view of my delegation that reform should have as its end result an improved and more efficient Organization, fully able to meet the demands of the Members which it serves. At the same time, reform would be meaningless if the Organization were not to have a stable financial basis on which to carry out its functions. It is imperative, therefore, that we find a way to overcome the myriad obstacles that have eluded resolution to date in areas such as the reform of the Security Council and the financial situation of the United Nations.

The Bahamas strongly urges all Member States to commit themselves to resolution of the question of Security Council reform at this fifty-second session of the General Assembly. The Bahamas supports the need to expand the Council's membership in both categories. This expansion must, however, pay due regard to the principles of equal representation, the reflection of the universal character of the Organization and the need to correct existing imbalances in the composition of the Council.

In a world confronted daily by press reports on the tragedies of failed efforts to preserve peace between nations — and indeed, between different ethnic and/or religious groups within nations — it is frequently easy to ignore the successes being achieved by the Organization. My Government welcomes the positive work being done by the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security. The fact that increasing numbers of countries are willing to cooperate with the United Nations is an indication of how important it is for the Organization to continue the implementation of its mandate in this area.

We note the success stories in areas such as Central America and also in Haiti, where the mandate of the Support Mission has recently been extended. It has always been the contention of the Bahamas Government that too early a withdrawal from Haiti had the potential of derailing the hard-earned gains made in that country. The continuing and recently escalating arrival of many Haitian migrants in the Bahamas is a sobering reminder that a setback in Haiti's difficult march towards political and economic stability could well be destabilizing.

The Government applauds the international community in its successful negotiation of a treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines. Bahamas will sign the treaty and ratify it as soon as possible, and hopes that the Convention will receive full support, particularly from the developed countries of the world. The Bahamas fulfilled its promise made last year to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and pledges early ratification, in keeping with its commitment to save succeeding generations from the scourge of nuclear war. These, along with other measures, bring us one step closer to the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

The Bahamas is of the view that the United Nations should serve as a pillar of support for the aspirations of its Member States and as a beacon of hope for the destitute of the world. Let us therefore resolve to have this fifty-second session of the General Assembly remembered as a decisive turning point in the work of the Organization. It should be remembered as a session where Member States were able to attain a greater level of understanding, trust, cooperation and a sense of purpose to empower them to deal with the problems affecting the international community.

Address by The Honourable Serge Vohor Rialuth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): The Assembly will next hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu.

The Honourable Serge Vohor Rialuth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, The Honourable Serge Vohor Rialuth, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Vohor Rialuth (Vanuatu) (*interpretation from French*): I am privileged today to be able to congratulate the President, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, on his election to preside over the Assembly at a period critical to the life of the Organization and its role in future relations between our countries and peoples. I should like to assure him of the full support and cooperation my delegation and my country will lend him and his country, Ukraine, during his mandate.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express the warmest congratulations of the Government and people of Vanuatu to the President of the preceding session, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, on the role he played during a period in mankind's history that will be noteworthy for a series of events that were important both on an international level and on various regional levels.

This is also a special opportunity for me to welcome the new Secretary-General of the Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, and to reiterate the support of the Republic of Vanuatu for him in carrying out his mandate as Secretary-General and, in particular, for the new initiatives he has taken and committed himself to take in the process of dialogue and consultation with all Member States with regard to the future of the Organization.

After more than 50 years of existence, the United Nations today finds itself facing an economic and international political situation that is increasingly complex and particularly more difficult for small developing countries in general, and especially so for the least developed small island countries, like the Republic of Vanuatu.

This situation should be recognized as one of the major challenges to the international community and one that must be dealt with through more committed international cooperation, particularly favourable treatment being given to meet the specific needs of those countries and populations that are its victims.

For the Republic of Vanuatu, the highest priority remains the economic development and social well-being of its population, more than 80 per cent of whom live in rural areas or on islands far from the administrative and commercial centre.

The maintenance of political stability and social harmony in a country depends and will continue to depend, first and foremost, on the country's orientation and economic development process. The rhetoric of certain development partners in trying to make their technical and financial assistance contingent on the political commitment of government leaders and on the maintenance of peace is futile with regard to the Pacific region. Such rhetoric tends rather to challenge the very integrity of these leaders and their commitment to socio-economic development in their respective countries.

Genuine international cooperation must not only be based on the high-priority socio-economic needs of the developing countries and on the interests of the donors; it must above all be anchored firmly in respect for the principles of sovereignty and mutual acknowledgment of the competence of the national political authorities in the exercise of their functions in office. In the framework of its restructuring and in the context of new international challenges, the United Nations is called upon to play a leading role in international cooperation on the basis of these new elements.

In this regard, the Government of Vanuatu most warmly welcomes the Secretary-General's initiative to establish a special development account for the developing country Members. I also wish to recall the importance and role of regional and subregional forums in the process of establishing and strengthening international cooperation. In our part of the world, the South Pacific Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group are concrete examples of such cooperation and their initiatives deserve the recognition and support of the international community.

On 24 October 1995, during the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter, the head of the delegation of Vanuatu declared from this rostrum the support of the Republic of Vanuatu for the reform and rational management of the United Nations system. Today, I reaffirm the support of my Government and congratulate Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the courage and determination that he has demonstrated in drafting and implementing this crucial reform. I fully share the Secretary-General's point of view when he emphasizes in his report that "Reform is not an event; it is a process" (*A/51/950, para. 25*).

It is well known that, throughout today's world, reform is also the sine qua non for a State's sustainable economic and ecological growth and development. Indeed, the global challenges that States must face require the constant review and ongoing reform of development policies and of the institutions of state, in order that the latter may become instruments and tools adapted to and honed for the accomplishment of specific tasks, while contributing to the vision of development that we have set for ourselves.

Seventeen years after attaining its independence, my country, Vanuatu, has made great social and economic strides. However, the disproportionate challenges facing a small island State such as Vanuatu determined us to initiate a reform programme early this year. This global reform programme, as we call it, covers the formal and informal economic sector as well as the public sector, in the broad sense of that word. With our reform, we would equip our country with the means to meet the major development challenges of the twenty-first century and to avoid or reduce the effects and risks, natural and otherwise, that stalk all developing countries and small island States in particular.

This vision of the future that we have crafted for our country requires the creation of dynamic economic conditions in which the private sector is the major protagonist. In most cases, attempts by Governments to act directly in the production of goods and services have purely and simply failed. It also requires the establishment and development of appropriate institutional machinery for technical and financial assistance that will promote the creation, development and growth of private enterprise while placing greater responsibility in the individual.

As the General Assembly is aware, it is not enough to create conditions for the development of a dynamic private sector that is a driving force for growth if we seek development that is economically and ecologically sustainable and fair. Indeed, in our case, we consider the reform and revitalization of the State as another sine qua non of this sustainable and fair development.

Hence, public administration must be made more effective and freed from any adverse political interference, allowing us thus to reestablish transparency, confidence, stability and the security of private investment. Our reform is designed above all to eliminate existing injustices and not to create others, which would represent failure and backsliding. With our reform, we seek equitable development that takes into account the development needs of our children and of generations to come. The redistribution of the benefits of reform and the situation of women, children and other disadvantaged groups must be seriously considered in the implementation of this reform.

Guaranteed fairness requires the assignment of the highest priority to education through the allocation of available resources. Only an up-to-date and high-quality education will equip each individual with the necessary skills and allow him to satisfy his basic needs and maintain his dignity.

It must be clear to all that the decision of the Economic and Social Council on 18 July to graduate my country, the Republic of Vanuatu, from the list of least developed countries was a surprise. I take this opportunity to reiterate the position of the Government of Vanuatu, as reflected in the official correspondence between my Government and the Secretary-General, the President of the Economic and Social Council and a certain number of friendly countries Members of the United Nations.

While recognizing the sensitive nature of this question, the Government of Vanuatu solemnly calls on this Assembly to consider putting off the question of graduation to the year 2000, when the indicators for identifying least developed countries will be finalized by the Committee for Development Planning.

My Government recently launched a global reform programme and will need the full support of the donor community in order to implement our reform and give our country the infrastructure indispensable to our growth. Similarly, during the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States held in Barbados, it was decided to develop indicators for the vulnerability index appropriate to this category of United Nations Member.

In this context, we consider the decision of the Committee for Development Planning to be premature and in no way reflecting the spirit of that United Nations resolution. Moreover, with more than 80 per cent of our population living in the countryside on food-producing subsistence agriculture; a well-paid expatriate population; and official development assistance equal to the State's annual budget and representing 20 per cent of our gross domestic product, we feel that the Committee for Development Planning's decision can only stem from a lack of adequate information.

We do not understand why least developed countries in the same situation as Vanuatu are treated differently and demand that we receive exactly the same treatment as any that, like us, meets two of the current identifying indicators for least developed countries, as laid down in the Committee's report.

(spoke in English)

As recognized by the Rio Conference and the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados, the issue of

environment and its close association with the concept of development has become highly complex and sensitive.

The convening of international conferences and the formulation of international treaties such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change are a clear demonstration of the significance of environmental issues in our development efforts.

Small island countries like Vanuatu and other Pacific island countries have taken some tough decisions to introduce restrictive measures internally in support of the international call for environment protection. They have also committed their Governments and nations to the principle of instituting a legally binding instrument which would guarantee the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to an internationally accepted level.

To the Pacific island countries, particularly the low-lying nations, a failure to fully address the issue at hand and to reach an acceptable solution could put into question the commitment of the international community, and could constitute a great security risk for our islands and our future generations.

The Republic of Vanuatu recognizes the United Nations initiatives and engagement in the globalization and liberalization of trade. The building up of the multilateral trading system since 1995 is a manifestation and reflection of the United Nations effort and desire to create a global and uniform trading environment that is conducted and based on the new rules and obligations provided in the Marrakesh Declaration.

My country has embarked on a wider process of consultations to seek membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The challenges and opportunities offered by this new regime are considerable, and therefore weaker economies like ours require time to adjust to their economic policies in order to accommodate the prescribed obligations and requirements of the multilateral trading system.

In this context, we would like to develop a common approach through the United Nations system, as well as the European Union, as our partners, in coming to terms with the demands and obligations of the newly established multilateral trading system. While all of us, in particular small islands and least developed States, recognize the need to come to terms with the World Trade Organization, we cannot and should not allow ourselves to be unduly pressured by its demands on these matters where we need to protect our trade preferences and interests.

What we perceive to be negative and of less relevance to us in the World Trade Organization must be changed according to our interests. There needs to be scope for all the small and vulnerable States to be accorded sufficient time to undertake reforms in trade and investment competitiveness with a view to creating a positive impact on the economy, particularly in their efforts to source private capital flows and foreign direct investment.

Allow me at this point to refer to the future relations between the 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) and the European Union when the current fourth Lomé Convention expires in the year 2000. After some 25 years, it is important to take stock and reflect on the challenges, opportunities and weaknesses of the Convention by reviewing the existing framework of cooperation. From a wider ACP perspective, there is generally a stronger desire and willingness to retain and strengthen the existing framework of cooperation in the areas of political, economic, trade and development assistance.

I would like to take this opportunity to strongly urge the international community, through this fifty-second session of the General Assembly, to recognize that there are realities which continue to warrant the need for continuity of the partnership between the ACP States and the European Union beyond the year 2000.

(spoke in French)

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm my Government's support for the process of reforming our great Organization which was begun by Mr. Kofi Annan in order to enable it to deal successfully with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Mr. Serge Vohor Rialuth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted from the rostrum.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.